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TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE
NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM LISTENING SESSION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2004

KEYSTONE COLLEGE
LA PLUME, PENNSYLVANIA
6:00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS, UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. VALERIE RAGAN, ASSISTANT DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

TAMMERA WOODS, MODERATOR

(The meeting began at 6:02 p.m. and opening comments were made by Mr. Bill Hawks and Dr. Valerie Ragan.)

MS. WOODS: All right. We have Gerald Carlin, John Enck--and I apologize if I mispronounce your name--Kerry Rood, Louis Hawley, and William Beaman.

MR. CARLIN: Good evening. My name is Gerald Carlin. I work with a number of farm organizations. The one I chose to put on the list was Family Farm Defenders, and I have the, I guess, unfortunate of being the first non-expert to speak. I enjoyed the presentation. It did answer quite a few questions.

There are some things, I think, that need to be addressed more seriously than what they have been in the past. One thing is the animal feed, and we know that rules were passed in 1997 banning a lot of feed products, and I know that those products were still being used up until at least a year ago. That's something that there needs to be more oversight on, and maybe the reason why there hasn't been oversight, there hasn't been adequate funding for oversight. But that really needs to be enforced more strictly than it has been in the past.

Another issue that I'd like to address very briefly is trade policy and a lot of cattle coming from Canada, Mexico. A lot of them may have originated in other countries that we wouldn't normally import cattle from. Probably Canada had imported cattle from England.

There needs to be tracking of animals before they get here. There needs to be identification on imported cattle. There needs to be identification on

imported meat, where it goes. The issue of country of origin labeling, I think, is important because consumers need to know where their food comes from.

Also, since this tracking system will be mandated by the government, and it will be designed in the public interest, it should be something that is paid for by public funding. Also, I think we need to be careful about the private sector. I know they are capable, but a lot of times I think that they can get greedy in the pricing, and I think that's why the states and federal government really need to oversee this very carefully.

Privacy is a major concern, and I think the only one that really should have the information is the public health officials. I'm also concerned about liability. Will processors, meat processors and so forth, pass liability of disease on to farmers? And I think it's an easy out and we need to be really careful that farmers aren't unnecessarily liable. I think animal ID can be effective as long as food processors and imports are watched and monitored. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. All right. John Enck.

DR. ENCK: Thank you very much. I'm John Enck, the state veterinarian for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. I thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for having this session on the National Animal Identification System. Certainly this system is one of the most important tools that we in the industry and government will be able to use to help protect our livestock industry, not only for disease eradication, but to help us--let our trading partners know that we

have a safe product and we are able to trace and be able to say that our products--we know where they come from, and we can do that containment that is always so necessary so that we don't have to quarantine large numbers of animals or premises.

Obviously, this is a Homeland Security issue, and the ability to use data rapidly and to make sure that we have the data available has been an issue with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture for a number of years. We've recognized very early on that we had 22 databases that did not talk to each other. Many of our producers were in many of these different databases and our laboratory system could not even connect the data from one of these to another.

So we put this database together recently, and it's now called the Pennsylvania HERDS. This database can use such things as electronic health certificate, electronic Coggins test, and we're able to initiate electronic data to USDA, and we'll be able to use the allocator whenever it becomes available for the premises ID with USDA. We were able to--we had the table ready to use in May for the allocation of premise ID's, and we met the goal of having the ability to do this by July 1, as the goal was for all states. However, we met with CFX and we still are unable to get allocation of their data from the National ID database.

We realize that USDA has many different databases, including this allocator, which do not talk to each other, and we cannot go back to that type of

system. We need to use a system like we have in this state where we have the data available and use this for GIS and epidemiologic investigations.

We want to thank USDA for being a partner and giving us the $615,000 for a project that we are hopeful to use in having the industry data and getting it seamlessly into our database, and helping the industry do this without pencil and paper, because 15-digit numbers are very painful and mistakes could be made. Thank you very much.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Kerry Rood.

DR. ROOD: Mr. Under Secretary Hawks, Dr. Valerie Ragan, we appreciate you coming up here to the northeast. We would like to extend--I would like to extend greetings from Secretary of Agriculture Steve Kerr from Vermont, and he has sent me down to speak here tonight. I'd like to thank--on behalf of Vermont, I'd like to thank Pennsylvania, New York, and the other government officials that are here and have made this happen.

We applaud the efforts of the United States Department of Agriculture in the development and the implementation of this preliminary animal ID system. We understand--Vermont understands that there are going to be some bumps in the road. We understand that there is going to be a minutia of detail that we're going to have to overcome and get through.

We would want to encourage those in charge to keep an eye on the goal, and the goal is, trace back. The goal is to be able to communicate with states, to be able to trace back in a disease situation.

We talk about confidence, consumer confidence, but we want to emphasize that we can't overlook producer confidence in the system. We need to have our producers buy into this. We need to have our producers confident that the information that they divulge will be treated in a manner that they would accept.

The final thing that we would like to stress at this time is that we would hope that USDA does not underestimate the outreach effort that needs to take place with the implementation of such a voluminous project. Recently I've participated in several interviews with the media in regards to the $100,000 that USDA granted as part of our cooperative agreement to Vermont, and we want to thank you for that. It became very apparent that there's a lot of misinformation out there. The reporters kept trying to get into text that it was a survey that we were doing, that it was part of a census like in the human setting. And so we would encourage that the outreach effort that comes from USDA be bold, be daring, and be forthright. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Louis.

MR. HAWLEY: My name is Louis Hawley, a dairy farmer and beef farmer from Montrose, Pennsylvania. Montrose is located about a 30-minute

drive north of our present location. My farm is a family business, with one son working full-time with me and two others helping part-time as they have employment off the farm but live nearby. I serve as a council member for Dairy Farmers of America as well as serving on the Pennsylvania Milk Promotion Program and the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council.

I believe we need an animal identification system, and the cost of such system should be shared. I believe that confidentiality will be a problem area for the program. Things that come to mind that cause concern to some are, cash sales haves not always been reported. An animal going through a series of sales and exposed to over a short period of time may be a problem. The program must be uniform and mandatory if it's to be effective.

Questions from my son are: with four locations of summer pasture, would we have more than one premise number? We hope not. What record or responsibility would we have for tags of animals that were born, tagged, and died on our farm? With this program in place, we really should go one step forward and have country of origin labels in place on all food items for sale in the United States.

And I'd like to make one additional comment besides what's printed on my hand-in. I do believe, from hearing from the other folks, that we need to ask that cattle coming in from other countries, Canada, Mexico, or whatever, have

systems of like expertise, I guess, is the right word. And I want to thank you for coming to northeastern Pennsylvania.

MS. WOODS: Thanks. Mr. William Beeman.

MR. BEEMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Bill Beeman. I'm a dairy farmer from Kingston, Pennsylvania. My farm is a family business, and we milk about 75 cows. I was pleased when I heard that you had scheduled a listening session on the proposed National Animal Identification System here in the northeast, and especially glad that it was close to my home so I could be here.

I serve as a director on the Dairylea Cooperative board. Dairylea has supported this program for several years and I have watched with interest as the national planning committee put together the proposals for a National Animal Identification System. It is critical that we have such a system, and the sooner, the better.

Some farmers will tell you that we don't need it, that it's just another bureaucratic program designed to appease the public. You know, it makes good political talk. Even after the BSE scare, there are still farmers who challenge the need for such a system, but deep down inside, I think their opposition and complacency is rooted in something much more fundamental: their concern about cost and confidentiality.

For several years now we've faced especially difficult financial times on the dairy farm. Yes, we've been fortunate to have good milk prices this spring and summer, but most of us know that lower milk prices will come again. These conditions cause a farmer to look at every part of his business and cut costs where he can, so we have to look at this new identification system and say, "What is it going to cost me?" I know that from what I've read that the estimates for developing and implementing such a system have been as high as five to six hundred million. Dairy farmers and beef producers can't afford to absorb this cost. This system offers benefits to everyone in this country and should be shared by all through government funding. We understand there may be some ongoing costs related to tagging and entering information into the system. Sharing some of these makes sense. I just hope the marketplace realizes the added value this system provides and responds accordingly.

Sharing information is the fundamental component of this system but it is probably one of the most troubling aspects to the farmer. You have to remember that we farmers value our independence and are always somewhat suspicious when the government can access any of our business data.

We must be assured that whatever needs to be done to maintain the confidentiality of this data will be done. If there needs to be special legislation to protect us from the Freedom of Information Act and other safeguards and special procedures need to be put in place, then this must be done sooner, not

later. I know that you have to have access to the information should a significant health risk arise, but this should be triggered only by designated state and federal animal health agency and closely guarded during the course of any investigation.

Finally, I encourage you to do all--[timer beeping]--thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thanks. The next five, we have James Zimmerman, Gary Heckman, Robert Suhosky--Robert's not here. Margaret Becker, and Crystal Bollinger, and Celie Myers. We'll start with you, James.

MR. ZIMMERMAN: Hello. My name is Jamie Zimmerman. I serve as a general manager of Dairy One Cooperative, Incorporated, and am a member of the board of directors of national DHIA. Dairy One is owned and serves over 5,000 dairy farmer members throughout the northeastern US with dairy herd improvement services and laboratory services. I'm pleased to be able to share some of my thoughts with you this evening on the proposed National Animal Identification System on behalf of our producer members and the farmers throughout the country that utilize a DHIA system.

I'd like to start by emphasizing that we strongly support the development and rapid implementation of the National Animal Identification System. The system is critical to the future of animal agriculture as we address issues of animal health, bio-security, and the confidence of the American public in its food supply. Having a system that will allow for 48-hour trace back from the

time of detecting a foreign animal disease helps meet the needs of protecting our industry and the consuming public.

Additionally, all efforts should be made to use time-tested, producer-owned and driven systems already in place to limit disruption to the marketplace, speed of implementation, and limit costs. The Dairy Herd Improvement system, or DHIA, has been in place for close to 100 years, and has its--has at its foundation the collection of individual animal ID's and premise ID's. Today, the DHIA system in the US already maintains records on about four and a half million dairy cows, or about half the dairy cattle in the country.

In our--the program operates in every state and has field staff that routinely visits producer members to collect and verify information. This information includes herd or premise information as well as individual animal information, including ID, date of birth, and movement in and out of the herd. This means that we have a system in place and ready to work with you to move the NAIS forward. In addition, the DHI system has served as an ID tag distributor to dairy producers for many years. We have experience in the area and already serve and are ready to serve the system as an AIN manager and distributor.

RFID standards need to be finalized so that we can begin work in this area. Dairy One is participating with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in their animal tracking initiative funded under the USDA grant

program. One of the goals of this program is to utilize existing DHIA system, capture ID information at the farm, to move it to the PA Department of Ag and ultimately to the national database.

We recognize producers' concerns over confidentiality of information. This must continue to be emphasized in the NAIS or the program will not be supported. The DHIA system has a proven track record of being able to effectively share information--[timer beeping]--thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Gary Pechmann.

MR. HECKMAN: I'm Gary Heckman. I'm the Executive Director for the Center for Dairy Excellence, and I'm presenting comments on the National ID--or National Animal ID System on behalf of the Pennsylvania Dairy Task Force. The task force represents a diverse group of Pennsylvania dairy producers and businesses, organizations, and institutions closely associated with Pennsylvania's dairy industry. We appreciate USDA making this listening session possible.

We recognize a number of advantages to a national animal ID System. Such a system could help to further build the strong level of consumer confidence that we enjoy today. Such a system could reduce the size and scope of marketing limitations for animal agriculture should we experience a foreign animal disease outbreak. Such a system would help US-produced products be viewed more positively on the world market, strengthening our export

opportunities. Such a system could provide added protection to prevent or deal with a possible agri-terrorism event. All of these things would protect or enhance livestock and dairy product marketing opportunities for us.

While we see a number of positives in the National Animal Identification System, we also have some concerns. Will the information that's gathered from farm and livestock be kept confidential? There really are too many personal interest groups interfering with our business operations today. Pennsylvania dairy producers have experienced returns on assets in the range of one to two percent, if that, during the past few years. This likely is similar for dairy producers in most other states. With tight financial margins like this, the cost of such an ID system must be kept low to the dairy producers. We have no way of recouping added costs that come from a program like this.

We encourage the development of user-friendly efficient systems that require little, if any, extra time on the producers' part. On-farm labor has been pared to the bare minimum on today's dairy farms. The National Animal ID System must be compatible with other farm technologies that are in place today or are being developed. This could be a potential labor and/or cost-saving opportunity for the dairy producers.

Last, we encourage the developers of the National Animal ID System to seek and use the input of livestock and dairy producers. Practicality will enhance the acceptance of this nationwide effort and respect the labor and cost

constraints that exist on today's dairy farmers. Thanks for your consideration of these comments and for coming to the great state of Pennsylvania and to the northeast to hear us. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Margaret Becker.

MS. BECKER: Good evening. My name is Margaret Becker, and I'm Deputy Commissioner for Food Safety & Animal Health of the State Department of Agriculture & Markets in New York. On behalf of State Agriculture Commissioner Nathan Rogers, I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide remarks regarding a National Animal Identification Program.

The need for a reliable system to track animals through market systems cannot be understated. Not only is this a public health imperative, but the viability of our food and agriculture systems demands it. If something should go wrong in our food animal industries, we must be able to identify the source of the problem immediately, remove affected animals and products from the markets, and to preserve consumer confidence by demonstrating systems are in place to protect them.

Likewise, our ability to trace movement of infected animals or materials will be key to preventing the unnecessary loss of livestock in the event of a serious disease outbreak. Accordingly, we need a national system that supports goals of both animal health and pre-harvest food safety, and we need it now.

The implementation of such a system is time-sensitive, especially in light of emerging animal health issues such as BSE and the threat of intentional introduction of disease agents. But the current approach facilitating parallel development of animal identification systems is likely to produce divergent solutions at a time when a uniform solution is needed. Enough preliminary work has been devoted to the exploration of different means of animal identification. The national solution to this issue requires that the federal government decide on a national system and assist state partners in implementing the solution.

Importantly, the recurrent concerns about confidentiality must be addressed right away. No one yet--has yet satisfactorily answered the question of how much USDA can do in an effort to maintain the confidentiality of the ID database. At the same time, access for all bonafide regulatory agencies, especially at the state level, must be maintained.

The system must be mandatory for all animals moving in market chains if it is to have the desired effects both on reassuring domestic and international markets and consumers and ensuring the 48-hour trace back capabilities. It must also be mandatory for all imported animals. In order to ensure compliance, efforts should be made to create added value for animals and products from participating producers as a way to encourage participation.

Additional standards for the premise ID component of the system need to be addressed. Currently it is up to each state to decide how to implement that, including allowing producers to self-register. We're concerned that a means to ensure the uniformity of the definition of "premise" is required. While the standard for defining a premise will have to encompass diverse animal production management systems, it should nonetheless be standardized. It should not be left up to the producer to decide whether to register different locations of separate herds or under identical premises.

The federal government must develop a means to support up-front costs of infrastructure development and support for implementations throughout the market chain. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thanks. Crystal Bollinger.

MS. BOLLINGER: Good evening. My name is Crystal Bollinger. My husband and I operate a beef operation in Mifflinburg, Union County. I am representing the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau this evening, and we want to thank you for coming to Pennsylvania.

On behalf of our organization and membership, we want to thank the United States Department of Agriculture for holding these series and particularly the one this evening.

We are in favor of the National Identification System. We understand the system will not prevent disease occurrence, but it will significantly reduce

the time required to identify premises with which the infected animals are associated. We believe that there are four issues that must be resolved in order for livestock producers to participate in the system and for it to work for the interest of producers.

The most common questions in the mind of producers include how to pay for the system, protect producers from undue liability, ensure producer confidentiality of data, and provide sufficient education and information for producers.

First and foremost, a National Animal Identification Program must ensure that the information provided by the livestock and poultry farmers are subject to the highest levels of confidentiality and the records of information provided by farmers are protected from public access.

Secondly, producers have concerns about how to pay for the system. Producers shouldn't have to bear an unfair share of the system's cost. It must be shared equitably between government and industry and producers to ensure that the program can be feasibly implemented at the producer level. Producers will play a large role in a successful animal identification program by contributing significant labor and capital.

Thirdly, producers need to be protected from undue liability. Producers worry that they might be forced to share liability for food safety problems that are now limited to meat merchandisers. The US Animal ID System must protect

producers, like my family, from liability for acts of others after the livestock leaves our control.

Finally, producers need sufficient education and input throughout the process so that they understand what animal identification systems will and will not do. There are still many concerns circulating around the agricultural community about privacy and liability issues as well as paying for the program.

We sincerely hope that you will bear all these concerns in mind as you move forward with establishing the National Animal Identification Program. Please consider incorporating these recommendations we have offered on behalf of the Pennsylvania producers today. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Celie Myers.

MS. MYERS: Good evening. I'm Celie Myers, and I'm here representing Taylor Packing. We process approximately 1800 head of cattle daily. These cattle are purchased in more than 25 states, and we've done extensive trace back work on cattle. Some of the cattle we have purchased in Pennsylvania have traced back as far as the state of Montana.

Taylor Packing strongly supports a national system of permanent ID that will allow trace back to the birth farm. We believe that such a system is necessary to allow for quick response to animal health concerns. We do not believe the system will have a strong correlation on food safety issues and we don't believe it should be represented as such.

We have participated in the National FAIR, Farm Animal Identification and Records Program since its inception and proactively support the use of radio frequency ID tags for cattle. We favor this technology because it allows for convenient collection and tracing rapid transfer of records through the entire production to marketing chain. Our experience with this model leads us to believe that sufficient confidentiality safeguards can be applied.

We're facing rapidly increasing pressure from our customers to achieve full trace back on all cattle. They tend to use the term "source verified" and for the most part our customers recognize that source verified does not make the product safer or better; however, they strongly believe that this is an issue of consumer confidence.

We believe that a National ID System should be allowed to develop as a voluntary program, as it is currently, to allow the industry to work out difficult logistics of ID-ing the huge cattle population. However, we also recognize that a voluntary system will have limited participation and that 100 percent participation is necessary for this program to be effective. The voluntary program must reach an end point that can only be achieved through a mandated deadline.

We see a great need for further development of educational programs to the producers in the livestock markets. There are many regional differences in the level of awareness of this issue, as well as regional differences in how

proactively the issues are being pursued. A larger nationwide effort must be coordinated to achieve significant results. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to comment.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Bob Gray, Jody Luttrepp, Tina Carlin. Okay, you're not. Paul Schultz, Beth Wittenbrader, Tom Williams, Donald Carns.

MR. GRAY: Secretary Hawks, Dr. Ragan, I'm Bob Gray and I really appreciate the opportunity to make some comments. I work with the six dairy co-ops here in the northeast with dairy farmers all the way from Maryland to Maine, about 10,000 dairy farmers, including the cooperative Agri-Mark, Allied, Dairylea, Dairy Farmers of America, St. Albans, and Upstate. I'm probably gonna use up my three minutes of time identifying who I am.

The point is that we strongly support the development of this plan, and we were pleased that the work had already been done. I don't think if that work had been done, we'd have been really scrambling, I think, at this point in order to get a plan in place, and I see you're following a lot of the framework for that, and we appreciate that.

The program, the databases have to be compatible across the country. This idea of a national program, we think is critical, and although a lot of our dairy farmers--and I think the dairy industry is more familiar, has had to keep records on their cows, DHIA and--for brucellosis testing and so forth over the

years, are more familiar with the record keeping. But in the end, if this program is going to work, it is gonna have to be mandatory. I know you understand that, because, as you pointed out, Dr. Ragan, it won't be effective. You'll just have too many gaps unless everyone is part of this program in the future.

Confidentiality, I think everyone has spoken about that. We are very concerned about it. I think the one thing I liked that you said tonight, Dr. Ragan, was the simplicity of this system, that you only need information for the tracking part that you're gonna be gathering so that it will be used. I think that's pretty critical in putting the system together.

Timeliness, of course, the 48 hours. I did get a kick out of the fact that we aren't gonna wait 48 hours, but being able to identify once you have an outbreak of the disease, that is gonna be crucial as well.

You know, this is really a national security issue, and I think Mr. Hawks pointed that out and others as you talked tonight. In the end, funding is gonna be also critical for this, and we know that we've put out $33 million. I think it is gonna cost four or five hundred million dollars, and maintenance of this database is a huge thing once it gets up and going. And the dairy farmers, we know that we're gonna have to share some of these costs, but the federal government and states are gonna have to all work together on this total cost of this program.

And I was pleased that Congressman Sherwood was here tonight. He works closely with our dairy co-ops. He is Mr. Dairy, as far as we're concerned, on the House side. I would also point out that Senator Specter has been very much involved in legislation and he held a hearing on the BSE issue earlier this year. So, again, I want to thank you for the opportunity. I know I parroted some of the things that have already been said, but I think that that's what you need to hear when you're putting this together. Thank you very much.

MS. WOODS: Thank you.

MS. LUTTREPP: Thank you for the opportunity. I'm Jodi Luttrepp, representing the Holstein Association.

This country's animal agriculture producers, including the Holstein Association USA's 35,000 members, which I represent this evening, are at risk today with the threats of additional cases of BSE in this country and the threat of foot and mouth disease. It is our belief that animal identification for production animal agriculture in this country needs to be mandatory.

Additionally, it cannot be technology neutral. The RFID technology is the most accurate, efficient, and cost-effective form of animal ID used in the world today and will likely be for many years in the future.

The National Farm Animal Identification and Records Program, or National FAIR, which is coordinated by the Holstein Association, is an animal ID and traceability program in place and working today that incorporates these

RFID tags. The National FAIR program provides each animal with a unique identification number and uses the electronic ear tags to identify and track the animals.

The Holstein Association USA has worked cooperatively with USDA APHIS Veterinary Services since the 1999 to design, develop, and demonstrate a pilot project for national livestock identification program that will trace livestock from farm to farm, farm to market, and market to processing unit. The goal has been accomplished with an RFID reader infrastructure already in place, a comprehensive database, a dedicated tag provider, and a coordinated field service staff.

The National FAIR program was developed by producers, for producers. Currently there are well over 1.4 million animals enrolled on over 10,000 farms in 47 states across the country. Information is stored securely in the FAIR system, and that includes where and when the animal was born, what locations the animal has been at throughout its life, and which animals it has come in contact with, and eventually where it has come to slaughter.

The information on the National FAIR database allows for tracing of animal movements from birth to slaughter in a few minutes.

Ladies and gentlemen, now is not the time to reinvent the wheel. National Animal Identification needs to be implemented in the United States now. Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you.

MR. WILLIAMS: I'm Tom Williams, a Jersey dairy farmer from Dalton County. I'm sorry that I was late, but in leafing through your overheads or whatever they were I was glad to see that you picked out the Holstein as causing the problem and not the Jersey, although I can't see what color they were up here.

DR. RAGAN: Brown. They were brown.

MR. WILLIAMS: No, no, no. At the Farm Bureau Policy and Development Meeting the other night we were talking about this very same thing, and the gentleman talked about an identification system for pigeons which you will hear about from the next speaker, so I won't go into that, but also I think we have to figure on not reinventing the wheel. There are so many other things which are already identified, people, cars, and such things, all over the rest of the world. And so if there are systems like that that we can use, then there's no sense in starting all over again.

These computer chips, if they could be in the front of the animal, and, like you say on page 4 or number 4, the system must not prevent the producers from being able to use it with production management systems. If you can develop a system that the farmer can use in his milking parlor or sort gates or weigh stations or anything else, there's a lot more likelihood that the farmers are gonna use 'em. If they could be positioned in the lip or in a tooth or in the pole

of the head or in the dish of the head, which Jerseys have, then there's a lot more likelihood that farmers are gonna be ready to adopt these techniques.

These chips that--like Dr. Smucker said--we're in partnership with FDA. If we don't have a market for our product, we can't sell anything. And if they get a computer chip in their hamburger, it's not gonna be very good. But if we can make sure that these computer chips are edible--you know, they start out as sand. If you eat a hamburger on the beach, you don't mind a piece of sand. And if it could be some dual identification, an ear tag, a metal ear tag, and some kind of a computer chip. These numbers could be numbers and letters and symbols and maybe even letters from another language, Chinese or Thailand or somewhere else. And the authority with these programs, I think, should stay within the states. The states can control much closer like they are in North Carolina, and I think there's another state out west that controls the privacy of these systems. If they're kept within state, the chance of somebody getting this information that shouldn't have it is a lot better. Thank you very much.

MS. WOODS: Thank you.

MR. PARKS: Thank you for having this program. I represent the Farm Bureau as well. I have a pigeon farm. I raise pigeons all over the United States. A long time ago we realized that we had to have a way of identification, and we have such a thing. It's a little computer chip. Right here it is. It costs less than $2. We can implant this--okay.

We have a way, when a pigeon comes home--first, it has an identification band that's put on its foot when it's born, when it's only about five days old. That stays on until it's no longer with us. Then we put--when we start--we put one of these electronic bands on. This has all kinds of identification. It says--this information is presently available and it's used all over in the United States and it's used mostly in Europe. And this comes from Austria. It tells the organization, the club it was in, the year it was born, the identification number, and all this other stuff, when it came in, the timing, everything. So when it comes home at our place, it goes across a little scanner board that immediately tells what time that bird come in. It's a little computer not any bigger than you have laying in front of you. And then--and you just press a button, and then it goes down and tells you what the bird is.

It's also hooked up to the internet. You can hook into the internet and this 2000 whatever, Bill Gates' program, Microsoft. If a bird comes into my loft, within 30 seconds I can tell you where that bird came in any place in the United States within 30 seconds. This identification program does not have to be--it's here. We've gotta use it. As they say, if we can't sell our beef, what good would it do to raise it? Thank you.

MS. WOODS: Thank you. Is there anyone else?

MR. PARKS: Oh. Can I say one thing? This could be implanted--we have a way of implanting this, we could put it right in their forehead. It would

be invisible to the naked eye, and with a scanner you could go over it, beep, and it would show right what the number of the animal is, where it came from, all the information.

MS. WOODS: Would anyone else like to provide comments? Okay.

(Additional comments were made by Mr. Hawks and Dr. Ragan, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.)